The Charlotte Catholic football team clashed with Country Day School in the annual Cook Cup rivalry game on September 3rd, riding a strong running game and stifling defense to a 21-7 victory.

A Friday night thunderstorm caused the 51st meeting between the two schools to be played on a Saturday, but Cougar fans still flocked to Country Day in droves, creating an excited atmosphere by the start of the game.

The game got off to a sluggish start, with both teams struggling to make headway offensively in the first quarter. Junior running back Alex Sabates finally put the Cougars on the board with a 13 yard touchdown run in the second quarter, but the Bucs answered with an 80 yard drive that junior quarterback Michael Radford capped off with a one yard touchdown run, and the game reached halftime tied at 7-7.

“In the first half I think we just had some minor miscues and maybe a little jet lag from Friday. Playing in the morning where it gets hotter instead of cooler like at night was a factor also,” said junior offensive lineman Chase Arnold.

In the second half Country Day threatened early, but an interception near Catholic’s own goal line by senior defensive back Nick Georges kept the game tied and was one of three second half interceptions by the Cougar defense.

“When I had the interception I was really excited, it’s a great feeling to know you did something to give your team an advantage,” said Georges.

Later in the quarter with Country Day driving once again, it was junior defensive back Tafon Mainsah who made the big play, intercepting another pass and returning it into Country Day territory. The Catholic offense then marched down the field, and senior quarterback Jack Brodowicz completed the drive with a 22 yard dash to the end zone, putting the Cougars on top 14-7. The score remained there until late in the 4th quarter, when sophomore running back Elijah Hood broke free for a 54 yard touchdown run that put Catholic up by 14 with only 1:39 left in the game.

“I was the happiest man alive at that moment. I knew that was what we needed and was happy to be the one to do it. I would like to thank my line for giving me those great blocks, I would be nowhere without them,” said Hood.

Country Day’s last ditch efforts came up empty, and time ran out on the 2011 Cook Cup, giving Catholic its second straight win and improving its all-time record in the series to 25 wins and 26 losses. The win provided a gratifying midseason reward for all of the team’s hard work.

“It feels like a mission accomplished. There's still a lot of football to be played, but for right now it's great to be able to celebrate with all my teammates. Taking pictures with them and holding the cup is one of the best parts of this season,” said Arnold.

Sophomore Elijah Hood made a huge impact in his first Cook Cup game, and acknowledged that playing in it was different from other regular season games.

“It was a bit more intense and exciting, and why not? It’s the Cook Cup. It was fun and I enjoyed the atmosphere,” said Hood.

For seniors such as Georges, the victory meant graduating with a two game winning streak, but also was their last time playing in one of the most exciting rivalry games in the Charlotte area, and it is an experience that they will miss.

“Playing in the Cook Cup is definitely something I look forward to every year so I’m sad that I won’t be able to experience it again next year, but then again I’m so proud to say that I have been a part of two incredible Cook Cup wins and I’m excited that The Cup will stay at Catholic for another year,” he said.

Playing on a Saturday required some adjustments from the players who had only found out about the game’s postponement minutes before the original Friday night start time, and this may have contributed to the low scoring first half.

“I hadn’t played a game on a Saturday afternoon since Pop Warner, but that’s something you overcome mentally. You have to refocus and get back into game mode, and that’s something our team managed to do,” said Georges.

Country Day had several players playing on both offense and defense, and Hood believes gave Catholic an advantage running the ball in the second half.

“They had so many players going both ways that they were probably very fatigued by the end of the game and I just seized an opportunity,” he said.

The red-clad, cowbell ringing Catholic fans were a force as always, and Georges said that they provided a boost for the team.

“Even though it was a Saturday afternoon the Cougar 12th man still turned out in some amazing numbers compared to the couple of students Country Day had in their stands. Having that support from your friends and family makes a big difference and makes me proud to be a Cougar,” he said.